

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Carrickmacross** Ref: **586**
County: **Monaghan** Mark: **319**
Category: **E** Date(s): **07/07/2015**
02/08/2015

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	46	44
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	45	46
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	46	47
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	35	37
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	14	14
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	52	53
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	37	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	39	40
TOTAL MARK	450	314	319

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Welcome Carrickmacross to the 2015 tidy towns competition that your involvement is greatly appreciated. We are delighted to hear that your committee has been reorganised and re-energised with new members and new subcommittees. This is an impressive level of organisation for a voluntary body and it clearly seems to be working for you. We are pleased to read the new committee works well with other community groups in your town as many of the voluntary and sports clubs in Carrickmacross appear to support your activities. However, there was no reference to Fas or the local leader partnership and we wondered if these were involved? Your communication strategy is comprehensive and imaginative comprising of newspaper articles, public meetings, a calendar (which you are not required to submit), website link, Facebook, WebCams as well as the new tidy towns van and we are no doubt that the strategy is working well for your committee. We applaud your decision to form a junior tidy towns committee and we would love to hear about the projects that you have delegated to them. It is great to see that your committee has been involved in the competition for almost 30 years and there seems little doubt that it has paid a key part in bringing improvements to your town. Thank you for your completed entry form and map and there's no doubt that it represents a lot of hard work on your part. However, it is a weighty document that is not very user-friendly. Please spare a thought for the adjudicator in 2016 when compiling your entry documentation. It is simply not possible to walk around your town (particularly when it's wet and windy) with a map in one hand and such a large entry form in the other. Although the map was quite good, the explanations for the map numbers were buried deep in your submission meaning that the map could not be understood without reference to the entry form. We noted that the second round adjudicator drew attention to your overly detailed entry form last year and requested an overhaul and we wondered if the large folder you submitted in 2015 was a slimmed down version of your 2014 submission? Surely not! Please be sure to heed the advice of the adjudicators for 2016 or it will be difficult for you to retain or increase marks in this category. Your tidy towns action plan was read with interest and we noted that there were major differences between your 2015 work programme and the projects identified in your plan. For example, just 4 projects are identified in the built environment section of your plan for 2015 and yet your entry form indicates that more than 18 projects have been completed under the built environment (and green spaces) category. Try and ensure that your plan captures as many of your projects as possible as this demonstrates that your committee are taking a planned and considered approach to your work and no additional points can be awarded for an action plan that is not representative of your work or which is simply not being followed. To improve the clarity of your submission for 2016, we recommend that your committee gets back to basics! Simply complete a tidy towns application form (that is issued by the Department) and attach a map setting out all of your completed projects. Proposed projects, photos, your plan and any other information should be a brief and concise and in a soft bound document (printed on double sided paper) that should form a separate attachment.

Built Environment and Streetscape / An Timpeallacht Thógtha agus Sráid-dreacha:

It is always a pleasure to visit Carrickmacross. Its attractions are numerous and they include the wonderful array of historical buildings that can be found throughout the town which remain in active use and which are presented to a good standard. On the approach to the town centre, we admired the Magheross Church building (without its troublesome ivy!) and further in, the St Louis Convent and St Finbarrs Church looked well. It was noted that the wonderful old Schoolhouse building opposite St Finbarrs is vacant and one hopes that it can be returned to active use soon. In the town centre, numerous heritage buildings are on view with the prominent Courthouse building at the top of the town looking particularly well. The lovely little toll house building was admired and it was wonderful to see the historical market square buildings in good condition and used for commendable functions like the tourist office. The magnificent St Josephs Church building provides a lovely central focus to the town. The Bridewell building was also observed and we wholeheartedly agree with the approach of providing false windows to improve its appearance and prevent further water egress. We are delighted to see that the refurbishment of the magnificent workhouse has continued in 2015 and this is a remarkably ambitious and successful project for a community group. It is great to see that so many private businesses and property owners occupy and maintain many of your excellent period buildings throughout the town. The bank of Ireland is a lovely natural stone building that looks particularly well and the Garda Station also caught our eye. The Breffni guest house and Walshes are excellent period buildings that are in active commercial use. Despite the significant number of heritage buildings in the town, it is refreshing to see that some modern building designs have been undertaken with the market square shopping centre (beside the toll house) and the extension to the lovely Shirley Arms Hotel providing a strong contrast to the traditional architecture. Further out, the modern design of the new Council offices was admired. We were most impressed with the standard of presentation of virtually all of the commercial and retail premises in the town with many properties on Main Street, O'Neill Street and Chapel Lane standing out. We particularly liked Bradleys Pharmacy, Wells and O'Carrolls Solicitors, Marrons Butchers, Birdys, Deerys, McNallys and Cunninghams Bar on Main Street which were all looking very well while St Vincents, Toals, the Credit Union and Connollys Pharmacy on O'Neill Street also impressed. We were pleased to read that the Committee has been very busy with projects under this category and we would like to commend them on the renovation of the Presbyterian Church and the provision of the singing stone project in the grounds of St Josephs Church. We were surprised to note that a green spaces category has been included under built environment and it is recommended that these projects should be included in the landscaping and open spaces category for future years. The new Skate Park (an excellent initiative which was popular during adjudication) and other improvements in the Clough Valley Park were observed. We were pleased to read that the wonderful Lisanisk Park has undergone a further upgrade and the Riverside Road green area has been improved. Well done also on documenting and providing signposting for a number of town trails.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

This is a particularly strong category for Carrickmacross with a large number of high quality landscaping schemes to be seen throughout the town. The attention that has been paid to the town centre is apparent with a significant number of green bowl planters, hanging baskets and tiered planters providing bright summer colours. The contribution of individual businesses and shops to the landscaping category is also acknowledged with many displaying attractive and well maintained window boxes and hanging baskets – the Wine Vault, the Garda Station, Markeys, Bradleys Pharmacy, the Fiddlers Elbow, Toals, Connollys Pharmacy, the Shirley Arms Hotel, the Courthouse, Birdys, Cunninghams and the Toll house are all worthy of mentioning. We loved the urban space in front of the Courthouse building which was greatly enhanced by the colourful hanging baskets and numerous planters to be seen. The planting on the roundabouts on the outskirts of the town is commended with the Castleblayney roundabout looking well with its grasses, perennials and what appears to be lavender to be seen. The Dundalk road roundabout also looked nice and accommodated a range of diverse planting. The committee is commended on their excellent maintenance programme with grass verges and other public areas looking particularly well. We were delighted to read about your tree planting programme (of 20 lime trees) as tree planting is strongly encouraged in the tidy towns competition. We were amazed to read about the massive 34,000 spring flowers that were planted in Lisanisk Park and we were a little disappointed as photo could be found in your submission that demonstrated this wonderful floral display – could this be provided in 2016? Well done also on maintaining St Josephs cemetery and for developing the wood land trail at Bath \ the Convent Avenue.

Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities / Fíadhúlra, Gnáthóga agus Taitneamhachtaí Nádurtha:

Your entry form indicates that this category received the attention of the tidy towns committee and that a comprehensive biodiversity plan was prepared to focus on two key aspects – raising awareness of biodiversity (among schoolchildren) and identify key biodiversity sites. It is noted that both of these aspects are being addressed by the formation of a junior tidy towns committee and identifying areas such as the roundabouts on main approach roads, the Lakeside Park, Convent / Bath Avenue and Bullys acre as wildlife habitats. The biodiversity plan was read with interest and it confirms that Carrickmacross has a good range of habitats (including Fen (which is part of a Natural Heritage Area), riparian, lake and woodland). We were delighted to see that the plan will enable the committee (and residents of the town) to focus on a number of areas where it will be possible to conserve, enhance or improve their biodiversity by undertaking a range of practical projects in the years ahead. This is a very valuable document and we look forward to seeing its implementation in the years ahead.

Sustainable Waste and Resource Management / Bainistiú Acmhainní agus Dramhaíola Inbhuanaithe:

It is great to see that your committee are well aware of the increased importance of this category in the tidy towns competition and that you are busy trying to improve your performance in it with your water harvesting initiatives (involving 10,000 L of rain water being captured), developing inventive watering techniques, providing community allotments and organising community aluminium / glass collections. It is further noted that schools and local businesses are also engaged in waste minimisation initiatives. According to your three-year plan, you proposed to

construct the Poly tunnel to grow your own plants for use in your landscaping schemes and we wondered if any progress had been made with this project? We note from the 2014 adjudicators report that composting takes place at the community allotments and we wondered if this compost is used in your own planting schemes? We would also like to hear if residents in Carrickmacross are engaging in waste minimisation actions and we urge you to undertake a survey to try and identify how residents of the town are engaging in waste minimization \ elimination behaviour. For example, what proportion is composting organic waste? This survey could be undertaken with the assistance of the schoolchildren who could ask their parents to take part.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

We were most interested to read that your 2015 campaign involved a serious effort to highlight the problem of litter in your town and search for better way to deal with it. Well done on carrying out a litter survey and for identifying litter blackspots – this is very practical way to approach the problem and it has been proven to yield positive results. It is noted that the mainstay of litter control programme remains the spring clean (which receives huge cross community and multi-ethnic support in your town) and regular litter picks and we urge you to continue with this approach. Remember, that people are much less likely to drop litter in an area that is clean than they are in an area that is littered. We are pleased to report that virtually all areas were observed to be litter free. There were a small number of exceptions with minimal and isolated amounts of litter to be found on the approach roads from Kingscourt and Crossmaglen and at the bring centre. However, these minor incidences did not detract from your overall performance in this category. Well done also on your tidiness program which comprised of weed removal, removal of posters, de cluttering pavements, reducing cigarette butt litter, coordinating street furniture and maintaining street and road signage. We are also pleased to read that a number of laneway and sidestreets have been upgraded and that some shopfronts have been improved. Improvements are still possible however. Some signs in need of maintenance seemed to have escaped your attention with a very untidy no parking sign and a no alcohol sign was spotted opposite Carrick Pharmacy while an untidy disabled parking sign was spotted outside Bradleys. In addition, some untidy green litter bins were spotted while a number of wall mounted postboxes may need to be repainted and the bins at the bring bank in the Supervalu car park should be power washed.

Residential Streets & Housing Areas / Sráideanna Cónaithe & Ceantair Tithíochta:

The standard of residential estates in the town was generally good but undoubtedly some estates have performed better than others. Clough Valley seems to set the highest standard and its incredibly impressive landscaping schemes, neatly trimmed grass, wooden picnic tables and semi mature trees were all admired. Rockdaniel Road is also very impressive. Drummond Heights looks very well and we loved the extensive and diverse landscaping alongside the entrance road. Emmet road was quite nice but some boundary walls needed attention, while we liked the mature residential area at Pearce Avenue. Chestnut Grove near the bridewell was quite nice and we loved the mature tree that (presumably) gives it its name. Cluain Alainn has much potential but the landscaped bed at the entrance was in need of attention. We were delighted to read that your local awards for best kept residential area and the most improved residential areas are hotly contested each year. It is particularly heartening to read that each residential area has an active residents association and it was clear during adjudication that residents take great pride in the appearance of where they live and that they work hard to present them to a high standard.

Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes / Bóithre Isteach, Sráideanna & Lánaí:

The approach roads into Carrickmacross looked very well during adjudication and the work of the committee on verge and footpath maintenance, landscaping and grass trimming is commended. The approach from Dundalk has clearly been the subject of careful maintenance and the roundabout was particularly impressive with its mix of perennials and summer flowering plants. Further in, the welcome stone and the Patrick Kavanagh sculpture all caught the eye of the adjudicator. The Blayney road approach also impressed with its large roundabout that appeared to be comprised of grasses, lavender and perennials. The roundabout on the Ballybay road also looked well with neatly maintained verges and a roundabout landscaped with a smaller range of diverse planting.

Concluding Remarks:

We would like to congratulate Carrickmacross on another good performance in the Tidy Towns Competition in which further progress was made. Be sure to follow the advice of the adjudicator when preparing your submission for 2016 and be confident that your lovely town and your great projects can speak for themselves.

Second Round Adjudication:

It was a delight for this adjudicator to visit your bustling town that was noticeably clean on the busy weekend I visited. As mentioned by the first round adjudicator, try to streamline your submission for next year please as the volume of material presented makes it difficult for the adjudicator to properly assess what is being put forward for judging for this year's visit. It is difficult to mention any particular business premises in the town core as the majority were looking so well and the business community is obviously on board with the Tidy Towns efforts. However some facades particularly upper levels could benefit from a coat of paint with peeling paint noticed in places, in addition some attention should be paid to tidying up where shop facades hit the pavements with again peeling paint noted in places. It was wonderful to see old buildings being put to good use in the town, such as the lovely old Market House, now converted to a tourism office but perhaps the signage and maps here could be updated as it is beginning to look a little faded and we wondered if all the business listed are still current. The muted green does much to coordinate your street furniture. It would be lovely if the distinctive 'arm lamp' above the door by the Barbers could be restored. Your approach to the derelict sites problem is impressive as seen in the works to enliven the temporary fencing at the ghost estate on the Ardee Road, such a prominent site on the approach to the main

street from the south. It is to be hoped that your efforts will be successful in resolving this issue in the long-term. Tree planting to the band of car parking along the main street further enhances the streetscape and frames the view to the lovely focal point of St Finbarrs Church which was very well maintained. Are there any opportunities to further extend tree planting northwards along the main street. Flower containers, window boxes and the tiered planters add welcome splashes of colour and are not over-fussy so don't detract from the character of the town. The Market Square centre also looks well with the historic stone Tollhouse incorporated around its entry stairs however this has resulted in somewhat of a litter trap with some recent windblown litter noted here at the base of the steps. The Shirley Arms Hotel had some colourful floral displays and is an attractive frontage facing visitors approaching from Monaghan. An old festive decoration opposite the courthouse on the Matilda café gable should be removed. Approach roads and verges are maintained to a high standard with particular emphasis on the roundabout landscaping with the biodiversity planting at the Castleblaney Road establishing well. The new avenue trees planted to the emerging business and commercial areas and by the recycling centre off the Ardee Road are a good start to establishing a strong landscape structure in this new sector of the town with the new Council Offices here as a focus. The Lisanisk Park was visited and work done here admired. This adjudicator endorses the comments made by the 1st round adjudicator in individual categories and especially congratulates all the effort put into the biodiversity report and your efforts to improve your underperformance in this category. Well done to all involved in this year's submission on the completion of some wonderful amenities for both locals and visitors to enjoy. I wish you every success going forward.